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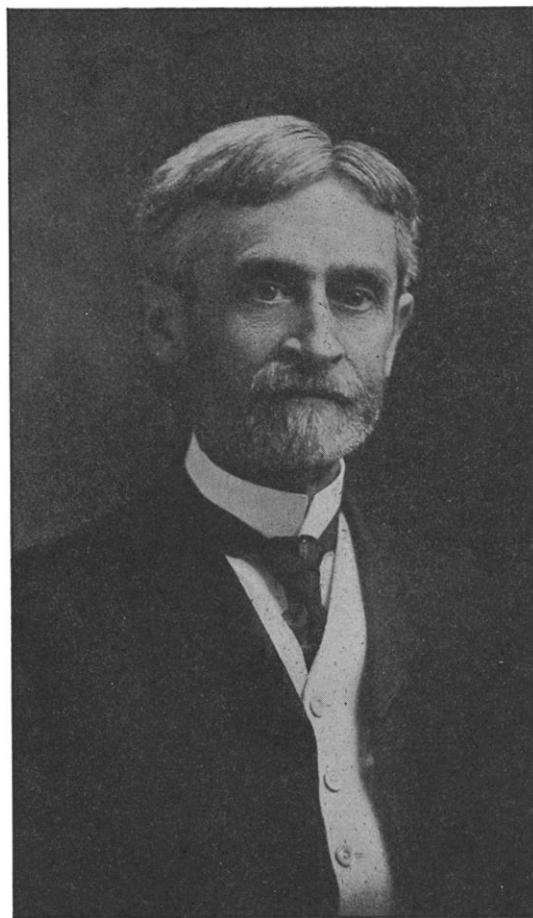
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PROFESSOR WILLIAM ARNOLD STEVENS

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William Arnold Stevens was born in Granville, Ohio, February 5, 1839. His father, John Stevens, of New England birth and education, a graduate of Middlebury College in 1821, emigrated in 1831 to what was then the far west of Ohio. His mother also was of New England birth, Mary Arnold of Charlestown, Mass. Serving from 1831 to 1838 as the editor of a religious paper in Cincinnati, John Stevens became in 1838 vice-president and professor of intellectual and moral philosophy in Granville College, now Denison University. When William was four years old his father returned to Cincinnati, entering again upon editorial work. Cincinnati in those days was an important center of the influences which were shaping the history of the Middle West, and the atmosphere of the Stevens home was calculated to develop in the mind of the children an interest in the making of history. An experience of five years in an extensive wholesale house in Cincinnati developed in William systematic business habits which characterized him throughout life. He graduated from Denison University in 1862 and spent the year 1862-63 as a student in Rochester Theological Seminary. Returning to his alma mater he filled the position of classical tutor from 1863 to 1865. During the years immediately following his college course he spent two summers on the battlefields of the South in the service of the Christian Commission. The three years from 1865 to 1868 were occupied in study at Harvard University and in Germany at Leipzig and Berlin. From 1868 to 1877 he was professor of the Greek language in Denison University, serving also during a portion of this period as acting president of the college. In 1877 he became Trevor professor of New Testament interpretation in the Rochester Theological Seminary. In 1881-82, accompanied by Mrs. Stevens, he made a journey to Palestine and Egypt. For this journey he had made previous careful preparation in the way of reading, and the



THE LATE PROFESSOR WILLIAM ARNOLD STEVENS, D.D., LL.D.

influence of it was manifest in all his subsequent work as a teacher of the Bible. He continued to fill the professorship at Rochester to the end of his life. He died at Rochester after a brief illness January 2, 1910.

In 1876 while professor at Granville he published an edition of selected *Orations of Lysias*. In 1887 he issued a *Commentary on the Epistles to the Thessalonians*. Though the requirement of the series in which this work was published made it necessary that it should appear as a commentary on the English text, it embodied the results of scholarly study of the original Greek. In 1892 he joined with the author of this article in the publication of an *Outline Handbook of the Life of Christ* and of a *Harmony of the Gospels in English*. He received the Degree of D.D. from Denison University and of LL.D. from the University of Rochester.

Professor Stevens' father was a tall man of large frame, and in his later years, with his abundant white hair and beetling eyebrows and somewhat stern manners, was well calculated to inspire his students with something akin to awe. The son, however, inherited the physiognomy of his mother rather than of his father. Not tall, of slender figure, of quiet, gentle manners, he won the respect and affection of his pupils by the sterling qualities of mind and heart. Never of great physical vigor he accomplished the tasks which he set for himself and which his position demanded, by discreet economy of his strength and patient persistence in daily work.

This is distinctly the record of the life of a scholar and teacher. Yet to none of those who enjoyed the privilege of intimate association with Professor Stevens was he simply these. Colleagues, friends, and students admired and loved him for his qualities as man and Christian. He was never a recluse, concerned only for what was written in books, and lost in things that could be recorded in class records and examination reports, but a man of broad human sympathies and broad outlook on the world. Well equipped in the field of his own special studies, he was also well read in philosophy, history, and poetry, and had a fair acquaintance with modern science. To him scholarship served the ends of life, and he took a deep and active interest in the progress of Christianity throughout the world.

Of the qualities that made him a scholar, and at the same time

endeared him to his friends, none was more fundamental than his genuineness and sincerity. This quality expressed itself in his personal relations. Always friendly, he could also, when occasion required, speak honest words of disapproval, far more to be prized than flattery, of which he was never guilty. This quality of sincerity disclosed itself in his prayers. Those who listened to his words in the Seminary chapel, or in his classroom would doubtless all unite in saying that they never heard from his lips an "eloquent" prayer, or one that did not evidently express a real and immediately present thought. He believed in prayer as a veritable communion with the living God, and with reverence but with frankness spoke to God the thought and wish of his heart.

The quality of sincerity was eminently characteristic also of his scholarship. To him truth was a sacred thing to be sought for earnestly and dealt with honestly. He believed, as he often, said that ideas ruled the world, and he looked upon thinking as the most serious and responsible business that one can engage in, being nothing less than the effort to find the realities upon which men can safely build their lives and society its institutions.

Some things were indeed settled for him beyond dispute. He was by definite intention and in reality a progressive thinker. But it was his ideal to make progress not by a perpetual revision of former opinions and convictions, but on a firm foundation laid once for all to go on building story after story of the structure of his thought. These foundation-ideas and convictions, fixed in his earlier years, he often referred to in the latter half of his life as the postulates of his thinking; in the interest of steady progress he sought to avoid, if possible, the reconstruction of these. Among these primary convictions were the reality and personality of God; the distinction between the natural and the supernatural and the reality of the latter, especially as an element in the life of Jesus Christ; revelation as a fact of human experience in which God is the active power; Christianity as a historical religion based primarily not on ideas but on historic facts; the Christian church as a divinely ordained agency for the achievement of the will of God in the world. But these were only foundation stones, or, to change the figure, the first stages of the road which Christian scholarship had to travel. In the region

that lay beyond them, there were numberless problems of lexicography, of grammar, of interpretation, of history, and of theology, that called for investigation. In this region Professor Stevens exemplified with singular fidelity the open-mindedness of the investigative scholar. In 1905 he said to one of his students of later years, "It has been my first object to find the truth, not to harmonize it. The chief satisfaction of my intellectual life now is that having earlier followed the truth when lines seemed to diverge, I now find these lines converging." He expressly approved the method of biblical study commonly called scientific, even when he dissented from the results which some representatives of it reached by means of it.

Many of his students have testified in after years to the powerful and permanent influence that he exerted upon them, precisely by this quality of his mind as it reflected itself in his teaching. It was this indeed that, joined to the beautiful character of the man himself, gave him his power as a teacher. Meeting Rochester men in all parts of the world, I have been struck with the testimony which they have repeatedly, I might almost say uniformly, borne to the great and permanent influence that Professor Stevens exerted on their lives. And almost always they have spoken of just this quality in him as being that which influenced them, viz., the downright honesty and sincerity of his thinking; and more than one of them has said that this was the greatest thing he found at Rochester.

My relationship to Professor Stevens I count among the best things in my life. It would be unfair to him to hold him responsible for all the opinions I hold today. For among the many kindnesses he showed me I count none greater than the fact that he often told me with frank kindness that he thought the opinions and convictions that I felt obliged to hold were wrong, and sometimes that the decisions I felt obliged to make were unwise. But of all my teachers none has had so constant or on the whole so powerful an influence over me as he, and for none had I higher respect or deeper affection. Doubtless Professor Stevens had the experience of many another teacher: some of his pupils, even of those who most clearly recognized their debt to him, applied the method they gained from him in regions other than those in which he had taught them to use it, and rode, perhaps roughshod, over some of those convictions which to him were sacred boundaries.

of thought. But none held him in higher respect and affection than these who through the influence of his teaching departed somewhat from it. Even he himself did not wholly escape the reflex action of his own scientific method, but in the latest years of his life re-examined the grounds of what he had for many years regarded as unchangeable elements of his thinking, not perhaps with the result of seriously modifying them, but of increasing that kindly tolerance which he had always maintained toward those who in the honest pursuance of the task of investigation had reached different results from his own.

A second quality of Professor Stevens' mind was his conscientious exactness. This sprang naturally from his sense of the value of truth. It was not enough for him to attain approximately accurate results. He wished to know the exact facts, whether in history, in grammar, in lexicography, or exegesis. If he was ever impatient it was with slovenly and inexact work.

It is perhaps but restating in another form what is already implied to add, as a third element that characterized him as scholar and teacher, that of reverence. He had a strong sense of the connection of the present with the past, and an immovable conviction that God is in that great historic movement of which our present is simply the most recent product and expression. This he held in a very special sense in respect to the Christian religion. To him this was not simply one of the great experiments of the human race in the attempt to relate itself to the Unseen Power. It was, as already implied, a revelation proceeding from God; and faith in Jesus Christ was something more and deeper than the philosophical conviction that there is meaning in the world and that that meaning is good.

Holding to this conception of Christianity and having always a broad outlook on human life, itself the product in part of his historic studies, he was deeply interested not only in the study of the Scriptures of this divinely revealed religion, but in its spread throughout the world. In spirit he was always a Christian missionary. Compelled himself to stay closely by his books and his classroom, he took an active interest in the pastoral and missionary work of those who had been his students, and in the progress of Christianity in all lands. He served for many years as the chairman of the

Board of Managers of the Foreign Missionary Society of his denomination.

Limited all his life by the limitations of his physical strength, less prolific as an author and less conspicuous outside his classroom than his abilities in other than physical respects fitted him to be, he yet admirably and beautifully combined the scholar of the study, the teacher in the classroom, the friend of his colleagues and pupils, the broad-visioned student both of the past and the present. He chose—who shall say unwisely?—to put his energy mainly into the tasks of the scholar and into the lives of his pupils, and many of these will always account his life and teaching as chief among the beneficial and formative influences of their lives.